DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 115 359 PS 008 007

AUTHOR Keyes, Barbara J.; And Others

TITLE The Development of Listener Competence.

INSTITUTION Bowling Green State Univ., Ohio. Dept. of Psychology.

SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Neurological Diseases and Stroke (NIH), Bethesda, Md.
REPORT NO NIH-NS-09590-03
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Denver, Colorado, April 10-13, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; *Early Childhood Education; *Egocentrism; *Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; Interpretive Skills; Kindergarten Children; Listening Comprehension; Listening Skills; *Role Theory

ABSTRACT

The effects of listener egocentrism in communication tasks was investigated as a possible explanation for communication failure in young children, since such failure has often been attributed to the cognitive egocentrism of the child. Twenty-four children from each of four grade levels (kindergarten, second, fourth, and seventh) were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Both experimenter and child had circles which were half white and half black. Under various conditions (1) child seated next to experimenter; (2) child seated at 90 degree angle to experimenter; and (3) child seated at 180 degree angle to experimenter) the children were asked to replicate the experimenter's placement of the circle on the basis of the experimenter's egocentric explanation of its position. Finally, each child was given Flavell's (1968) storytelling task to assess general role-taking ability. Results demonstrated that listeners actively contribute to the success of the communication problem by compensating for inadequate messages; and that there is a progression in the development of this ability. Conclusions suggest types of listener compensation strategies and advise caution in attribution of listener competence to role-taking ability. (ED)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED115359

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENER COMPETENCE

Barbara J. Keyes, Harry W. Hoemann, and C. Jean Rogers

Department of Psychology
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

PS 008007

Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Denver, 1975.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF LISTENER COMPETENCE

Problem. Although cognitive egocentrism has often been cited to explain communication failure in young children, few studies have systematically investigated possible effects of listener egocentrism in communication tasks. Logically, a communication failure may result from an inadequate message given to a competent listener or an adequate message given to an incompetent listener. Similarly, success can not be taken as evidence for the competence of both members since a listener may be able to compensate for inadequacies in the speaker's message and respond correctly. This study addressed the possibilities that 1) a listener may be able to overcome the inadequacies of an egocentric message and 2) this ability is age-related. In addition, the nature of the construct of egocentrism was clarified by asking 3) whether the compensation was accomplished by taking the speaker's perspective (i.e., acting in a nonegocentric fashion) and, if so, 4) whether this behavior was related to a more traditional measure of role-taking ability.

Procedure. Twenty-four children from each of four grade levels, kindergarten, second, fourth, and seventh, were randomly assigned to either an experimental or control group. All children were given a disc with one hemisphere painted black, one white, and asked to place it on the table so it would look like the experimenter's. To accomplish this, the child had to rely upon the experimenter's description of her disc. Corrective

feedback consisted of allowing the child to see the speaker's disc after each response. The control group, seated beside the experimenter, shared her perspective and, so, received adequate messages. The experimental group, seated 90° from the speaker, received egocentric messages. Since their perspective differed from the speaker's, these children were forced to transform the message to respond correctly.

After reaching criterion on this task, all listeners were shifted to a 180° perspective condition. Children utilizing a generalizable perspective-taking strategy (e.g., imagining themselves in the speaker's place) were expected to pass this transfer task, while the children employing a more perspective-specific strategy (e.g., substitute "right" when she says "top") would err. Finally, each child was given Flavell's (1968) storytelling task to assess a more general role-taking ability.

Results. Older children made fewer errors in the communication task, and the 90° condition was more difficult than 0°, although this difference decreased with increasing age. Passage of the transfer task increased developmentally and was not highly correlated with passage of Flavell's (1968) role-taking task.

The results demonstrated that listeners actively contribute to the success of a communication problem by compensating for inadequate messages and that there is a progression in the development of this ability. The kindergarten children 1) were unable to deal with an inadequate message (i.e., failed to achieve criterion) or 2) dealt with an inadequate message by

adopting a perspective-specific strategy, failing the transfer task. Second-graders, on the other hand, appeared to have perspective-taking skills but failed to exercise these skills spontaneously. When given strong cues regarding perspective differences, such as sitting to the right of the speaker and receiving corrective feedback, however, many second-graders adopted a generalizable perspective-taking strategy. Fourth- and seventh-graders did not require this "prompting" to use the perspective-taking strategy, perhaps because either 1) the weaker cue of shifting position at the table was sufficient or 2) they were already spontaneously adopting the perspective-taking strategy.

Conclusion. The study isolated two types of strategies which listeners used to compensate for an inadequate or egocentric message. The discovery of a perspective-specific operation suggests caution in attributing listener competence to role-taking ability although, developmentally, the adoption of a perspective-specific strategy may be a necessary precursor of perspective-taking.

Table 1.

Mean Trials to Criterion on the Communication Tasks and Proportion of Listeners Passing the Transfer Tasks

Grade Level	Communication		Transfer	
	90°	0°	90°	0°
KG	20.75	6.50	.42	.08
2	6.25	1.00	.92	.25
4	3.25	1.08	.83	.67
7	5.08	.08	.83	.83

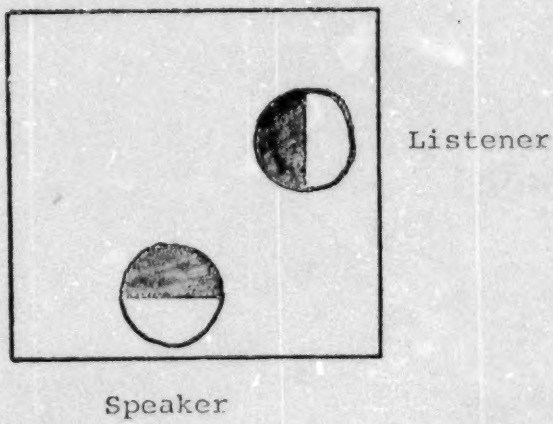

Figure 1. An egocentric response in the 90° position.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the teachers and principals of Bowling Green and Perrysburg Public Schools for their cooperation. This investigation was supported in part by N.I.H. Research Grant NS-09590-03 from the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Stroke.

30607